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UNCLAS KINSHASA 000126

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CONGOLESE SEEK REFUGE IN UGANDA FROM CONFLICT IN THE EAST

1. (U) Summary. Fighting in Ituri and N. Kivu during December and early January resulted in the exodus of close to 20,000 refugees from the DRC into Uganda. Some refugees have been transferred to a camp in the Ugandan interior, others remain in border areas where humanitarian agencies are providing them assistance, and significant numbers have already returned to the DRC. Fighting in both areas has declined and UN agencies do not expect further refugee movements. End Summary.

Refugees Flee Ituri

2. (U) UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and MONUC sources told poloff January 19 that fighting that began in mid-December in the area near Lake Albert in Ituri had caused 5,000-7,000 people to cross the Lake into Nkondo, Uganda. According to MONUC, fighting around the Tchomia area of Lake Albert has been motivated by a struggle for leadership within the Party for Unity and Safeguarding the Integrity of Congo (PUSIC) militia controlling the area. During this struggle, the Union of Congolese Patriots-Lubanga (UPC-L) also tried unsuccessfully to take over Tchomia, an area with lucrative customs and trade opportunities.

Refugees Flee N. Kivu

3. (U) UNHCR sources said fighting in North Kivu between Mai-Mai and ex-Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma (RCD-G) elements starting in December and intensifying January 12, sent approximately 10,000 refugees into Ishasha, Uganda. As of January 21, however, the situation in the area of conflict has improved and up to 7,000 refugees have returned to the DRC.

Humanitarian Assistance

4. (U) UNHCR representatives in Kinshasa said that refugees in Nkondo and Ishasha are receiving humanitarian assistance from MSF-France, UNICEF, and the World Food Program. However, there is a shortage of drinking water and insufficient access to health care. UNHCR has already transferred 1,157 refugees from Nkondo, and 1,089 from Ishasha to a more permanent refugee camp deeper in Uganda (Kyaka II) to provide better assistance and greater security to remaining refugees. Since the fighting in Ituri and N. Kivu has ceased and the situation has stabilized, UNHCR does not expect a further exodus of refugees.

5. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.
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